

[Hell, Bob An' Me Planted 'Em]

AUG 8 1939

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK Forms to be Filled out for Each Interview

FORM A Circumstances of Interview

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Earl Bowman

ADDRESS 86 West 12th Street

DATE July 20, 1939

SUBJECT "Hell, Bob An' Me Planted 'Em"

1. Date and time of interview
2. Place of interview
3. Name and address of informant
4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant.
5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you
6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

Library of Congress

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK

FORM C

TEXT OF INTERVIEW (UNEDITED)

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Earl Bowman

ADDRESS 86 West 12th Street

DATE July 20, 1939

SUBJECT "Hell, Bob An' Me Planted 'Em"

"We were camped by a little trout stream that cut its way through the rich mountain soil just off the low divide between Price Valley and Salmon Meadows when my Uncle Steve Robertson told me the "true" story of the 'Big Trees' of California, and how they happened to be so big.

"All around us was a park-like forest of stately Idaho Yellow Pines, their three, four even five-foot trunks straight and smooth and limbless for thirty feet or more, their crowns towering into the sky a hundred or a hundred and fifty feet.

"Gee, Uncle Steve, there's sure some wonderful timber in this part of Idaho, isn't there?" I said. "Just look at those tree, why one of 'em must have lumber enough in it to almost build a house— Gosh 2 they're big. But beside some trees I saw in California once, these Idaho pines, big and grand as they are would only be "saplin's. 'sequoias,' they call those big trees in California and some of them must be thirty-five or forty feet in diameter.

Library of Congress

They're supposed to be thousands of years old and they probably are because it would take a tree a hell of a long time to grow as big as those California 'sequoias' are. They're 'whoppers,' no doubt about that....”

“Yeah, I-Gawd,’ my Uncle Steve Robertson said, 'they probably are whoppers by this time, I ain't sayin' they ain't. In fact they couldn't be nothin' else but big, considerin' what they was fertilized with. Yeah, they sure as hell was fertilized an' to such a extent, I-Gawd, they jest couldn't help growin' as big as they be an' more'n likely they'll be a hell of a sight bigger 'fore they quit growin'.

“But when it comes to them California big trees bein' thousands of years old, like you said, or even bein' 'sequoias,' I-Gawd that's jest some smart-aleck's idea.

“Probably some feller that didn't know nothin' about trees an' timber an' things like that wanted to show off an' told people they was 'sesquoias' an' they was 'thousands of years old,' an' I-Gawd like damned fools people believe it. But that's th' way people is, most of 'em believe any danged thing they hear without takin' th' trouble to git at 3 th' bottom of things and find out for theirselves whether its so or not.

“An' that's th' way it is with them big trees in Californy! They ain't no thousands of years old an' they ain't no cussed 'sequoias'— They're jest plain damned Arkansas cedar trees, an' they like a hell of a lot of bein' any older probably than these Idaho yaller pines is, an' also they was jest as much 'saplin's oncet as any other doggone trees ever was.

“Yeah, I-Gawd, I ought to know, 'cause— Hell, Bob White an' me planted 'em!

“Course me didn't realize what we was startin' when we planted th' damned things or we never would a-done it in th' first place.

“But us Pioneers of th' Far West in th' early days probably made mistakes oncet in a while like eveR'body else does, but one thing about it, when we did make any damned mistake

Library of Congress

an' found out we'd made one, I-Gawd we didn't keep on makin' it jest for pure contrariness like lots of people does now-a-days.

“Yeah, I-Gawd, Bob an' me made a hell of a mistake when we planted them big Californy trees in th' first place. But, our mistake wasn't in jest planted 'em so much probably as in where we planted th' damned things.

“If we'd had any idea what th' damned things was goin' to be fertilized with, we'd never a-planted 'em to start with...I-Gawd we sure as hell wouldn't have.

4

“But we planted 'em an' after th' damned things got started to growin' they wasn't no chance on earth to do nothin' about it but jest let'em grow—an' I-Gawd you see what happened! What we thought was goin' to be jest a nice, comfortable Arkansas cedar grove turned into a regular cussed wilderness of 'big trees' that nobody can do a doggone thing with only jest let'em grow an' grow until Gawd known how damned big they'll be 'fore they quit growin'—

“Yeah, that's the way it is, an' that's th' way it usually is, people start some damned thing an' then I-Gawd they find out they've made a hell of a mistake but they can't stop it!

“...Bob an' me planted them big Californy trees th' time we was gittin' out of th' Arizony country after th' hot spell that petrified all them damned buzzards, et ceterry.

“When we got up in th' Californy country— After we'd stopped that time out in the Mojave desert where we staked down that damn floatin' lake, I told you about oncet, well, we come to that valley where them big trees is an'it looked like it might be a hell of a good place to start a ranch. It was smooth an' nice lookin' land but there wasn't a damned thing growin' on it— Jest smooth, rich lookin' soil.

Library of Congress

“So, Mam, (she was Bob's wife) said: ‘Bob White, an' you too, Steve Robertson, if I know anything about th' looks of land, this would be a hell of a good place to stake out a ranch an' settle down. I Know,’ Mam says, ‘they's a 5 heck of a lot of Piute Injuns in this section, ‘cause we've seen ‘em, but in spite of that land looks like things would grow on it an' I'm tired of movin' ‘round. So, I'm in favor of stoppin' right here an' startin' a ranch. If I'm any judge of rich land, this land is th' richest danged land I ever seen in my life, even if it is kind of funny lookin’,’ Mam said.

“Well, Bob an' me'd sort of set our minds on gittin' up into this Idaho country, but Bob always was considerate of Mam an' tried to do whatever she wanted him to do, ‘cause he wanted her to be as happy as she could, knowin' like he did that it was hard enough life them women-Pioneers like Mam was, had to live anyhow without contraryin' them any more'n was necessary.

“So, Bob said: ‘Far's I'm concerned Mam, I'd jest as soon stop here an' start a ranch as not if you think you'd be contented here, Mam. ‘Cause I sure as hell want you to be contented, Mam. But, I-Gawd, they ain't no trees an' you know damned well you was always a great hand for trees— An' what th' hell will we do about that? An' also, th' surroundin' country's full of them cussed Piute Injuns—we know it is ‘cause we've seen ‘em almost steady ever since we got up into this section, an' Piute Injuns ain't very damned nice neighbors. What'd you think about it, Steve? Bob said.

6

“Personally, it don't make no difference to me,’ I said, ‘As far as Piute Injuns being plentyful in concerned, I'd jest as soon have Piutes as any other cussed kind of Injuns for neighbors and regardin' startin' a ranch here, I'd jest as soon start it here as anyplace else, so I don't give a damn either direction,’ I said.

“That's perfectly alright, Bob White, an' you too, Steve Robertson,’ Mam said, “I've thought about all that. An' as far as Piute Injuns is concerned, you notice that even if the general

Library of Congress

country does seem like it's full of 'em, you notice they ain't none of 'em hangin' around this imedjiate neighborhood. So, I calculate they won't bother much. An' regardin' they not bein' no trees growin', that can be fixed danged easy 'cause I got a whole sack full of Arkansas red cedar tree seed I picked offen that cedar tree in our front yard in Arkansas 'fore we started migratin' to th' Far West. All we got to do is plant them Arkansas cedar tree seed an' if that soil's as rich as it 'pears to be we'll soon have a nice grove of cedar trees, which will be a good place for th' chickens I'm aimin' to raise to waller under in th' dust. Th' smell of th' cedar trees will also help keep th' mites an' lice from worryin' th' chickens to death,' Mam said.

"Well, I-Gawd that's th' way it started.

"Jest to please Mam an' keep her contented, Bob an' me took that sack full of Arkansas red cedar tree seed an' planted th' whole cussed works, figgerin' that maybe some 7 of 'em wouldn't grow, but we planted 'em all so Mam would be sure to have a cedar grove for her chickens to waller under in th' dust...

"Yeah, Bob an' me planted ever' cussed cedar tree seed Mam had brought from Arkansas, never realizin' I-Gawd how rich an' fertilized that damned land was, an' th' whole works come up! Ever! damned seed... Hell yes, we hadn't hardly got th' last of 'em planted when th' one we planted first was already up an' growln' to beat hell!

"Yes, sir, I-Gawd, you never saw nothing' come up as prompt as them damned Arkansas red cedar tree seed done. It seemed like that soil jest squirted 'em right up...

"Gawd-a-mighty," Bob said, 'I never seen nothing' like it in my life. This whole district must a-been a old sheep corral or somethin' oncet for th' soil to be as fertilized as it is!' Bob said.

"No damned sheep manure ever made things grow like them cedar tree seed's growin',' I said. "I-Gawd, no. Sheep manure's a powerful fertilizer but it ain't powerful enough to make

Library of Congress

things grow that a-way. Whatever this lands fertilized with is a hell of a sight powefuler than any cussed sheep manure.' I said.

"Mam, she was tickled as hell. 'I told you, Bob White, an' you too Steve Robertson, that this was th' richest dang land anybody ever seen, an' now I reckon you'll believe me. It won't be no time now till we'll have a nice cedar tree grove for me to watch th' chickens waller in th' 8 dust under an' to hang my washin' on when wash days comes.' Mam said.

"Well, I-Gawd, Mam was plumb right...

"Yeah, she was right as hell. Bob an' me finished plantin' them damned Arkansas cedar tree seeds on Friday- no, I'Gawd, it was on a Thursday, yeah, Thursday about a hour before sundown, I don't want to stretch things none cause I sure hate a damned liar or 'xaggerater— an' by th' next Monday them cussed cedar trees was up an' jest about tall enough for Mam to spread her washin' on (Monday was always Mam's washday.)

"Its a pleasure to have cedar trees to spread my washin' out on,' Mam said, 'it makes me think of how I used to spread things out on our cedar trees back in Arkansas...'

"Well, Mam didn't git her washin' out till late, plumb near sundown, so they wasn't dry enough to take in that night an' she had to leave 'em out till th' next day. An' I-Gawd, that's where Mam got a surprise: Th' next mornin' them damned cedar tress had growed so fast that Bob's an' my shirts an' drawers an' Mam's 'Mother Hubbards' an' aprons an' night-gowns an' et cetary was up so cussed high she couldn't reach 'em.

"Bob an' me had a hell of a time climbin' them danged trees fast enough to ketch up with 'em an' git 'em down for her. An' we never did git one of Bob's sox which Mam had hung plumb on top of one of 'em—

Library of Congress

I-Gawd, we never did git it an' far as I know th' damned thing's still up there flutterin' from a limb on top of one of them doggone trees. (Yeah, it probably is') Bob cussed awful on account of th' blisters he got on his foot that didn't have no sock on it when he had to go around wearin' jest one sock while Mam had his other pair in th' wash.

"Hell, I don't reckon there ever was anything growed faster'n them cussed cedar trees that people that don't know anything about it calls them 'sequoias,' like you said...

"Yes, sir, I-Gawd, some of Mam's chickens managed to climb up in one of 'em one night to roost in it an' th' next mornin' them damned chickens was up so high that when they tried to jump down out of it practically ever' one of 'em busted a leg when they hit th' ground— It was pityful as hell to see them poor doggone chickens tryin' to stand on th' only good leg they had an' scratch with it at th' same time!

"It was plumb unnatcheral how fast an' how cussed big them trees growed.

"I'd like to know what th' hell this soil's fertilized with,' Bob said. I-Gawd, I never seen nothin' like it— For two cents I'd plant some watermelon seeds an' see jest how damned big watermelons this ground would raise anyhow!"

10

"You'll do no sech a cussed thing,' Mam said, an' put her foot right down on it, 'if this ground works on watermelons like it does on them cedar trees, I-Gawd, an' th' watermelons growed in proportion, by th' time they was ripe they'd be so cussed big that if th' lightin' struck one an' busted it an' knocked th' water out of it it would flood th' whole dangd country! No, sir, Bob White an' you too Steve Robertson, jest keep them watermelon seeds out of this doggone soil, we ain't goin' to take no chances like that,' Mam said.

Library of Congress

"Probably you're right, Mam,'Bob said, 'that's jest about what would happen, but I-Gawd, I'd sure as hell like to know what this damned section of Californy's fertilized with, anyhow,' Bob said.

"Well, sir, I-Gawd th' very next day I found out what was makin' them doggone Arkansas red cedar trees Bob an' me had started growin' in that Californy soil act th' way they did...

"A old Piute Injun chief I knowed come along an' when he saw all them damned trees growin' where they was he started howlin' an' wailin' like his heart was plumb broke. Natcherally, I asked him what th' hell was th' matter ('cause while I ain't never mentioned it, I can talk Piute jest like a native.) An' besides I'd give th' old chief a sack of smokin' tobacco oncet an' we was good friends, so he told me...

11

"For millions of years th' damned Piutes had been comin' for miles around an' bringin' any doggone Piute that was dead to bury him in that special part of Californy; from what th' old chief said it was th' only damned spot in Californy that was easy diggin', th' rest of it bein' hard ant gravelly, so for millions an' millions of years they'd been plantin' dead Piutes on that same doggone spot! I-Gawd, th' whole damned country was under-laid with dead Piutes an' anybody that knows anything about dead Piutes knows that a dead Pluto is th' strongest cussed fertilizer they is!

"Hell, yes, dead Piutes Is richer fertilizer than any damned sheep manure or any other kind of doggone manure they is... Things planted where th' soil is fertilized with dead Piutes jest can't keep from growin' an' I-Gawd when it oncet starts to growin' they ain't nothin' nobody can do about it only jest let it keep on growin'... So that's th' way it was.

"Natcherally, when Mam found out they wasn't no doggone way to keep then damned Arkansas cedar trees from growin' till they'd exhausted all th' Piute Injun fertilizer they was planted in, or till they finally died from old age, or got so big, they covered th' whole

Library of Congress

danged country, I-Gawd, she saw how foolish it would be to try to start a ranch there, so she said:

“Bob White, an' you too, Steve Robertson,' we'd jest as well hitch th' mules up an' git out of this 12 cussed neighborhood... I can stand 'most ever'thing but I8m drawin' th' line at livin' where th' whole country's saturated with dead Piute Injuns. But they sure as heck are strong fertilizer, ain't they?' Mam said.

“Well, Bob an' me hitched up th' mules an' we headed an up to this Idaho country where th' soil's good an' rich but not too damned rich...an' things grow natcheral an' normal an' like Natchure aimed for 'em to grow in th' first place.

“But, I-Gawd that's th' way them 'big trees' (Sequoias) (some damned fools call 'em) happened to be there in th' first place an' how they happen to be so cussed big— They can't help growin' an' can't help bein' big ... fertilized like they be with dead Piute Injuns... An' I-Gawd if anybody don't believe it all they got to do is dig one of ' em up an' see for theirselves if th' cussed thing ain't bein' fertilized with dead Piute Injuns...

“Hell, I ought to know, Bob an' me planted 'em!

END